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CONTENTS

Current Affairs and Bible Prophecy	Page 1
Editorial	Page 10
Basic Bible Teaching	Page 11
From our Mail Bag	Page 19
Between the Testaments	Page 23

COVER PICTURE: The Taj Mahal at Agra, India

Current Affairs *Bible & Prophecy*



The Rise of Islam

IT IS AMAZING to think that Judaism, Christianity and Islam, three of the major religions in the world which cover more than 40% of the world's population, each have their roots in the Jewish Old Testament Scriptures.

For hundreds of years the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) was the only written source of information about the Creator and His purpose with the earth. It was revealed to Moses through the inspiration of God (God breathed) and written down at about the time of the Exodus some 1400 years before the birth of Christ. Later the remainder of the Old Testament was added including the historical books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, the Psalms and the prophetic books.

Jesus emphasised in his teaching an understanding of the Old Testament based on the 'spirit' rather than the 'letter' of the law (the Torah). His teaching is found in the Gospel records and the writings of the Apostles. These writings are found in the New Testament, which was completed in the first Century AD.

Muslims believe that Mohammed (Mahomet) had a series of divine revelations which after his death in 632 AD, were put together to produce the Koran. This was based mainly on the Old Testament as he was

influenced by a Jewish community in the predominantly pagan country of Saudi Arabia. He recognised the value of Jewish monotheism and their Scriptures and accepted the basic tenet that faith in the Word of the one God (Allah) was essential.

COMMON IDEAS AND COMMON PROBLEMS

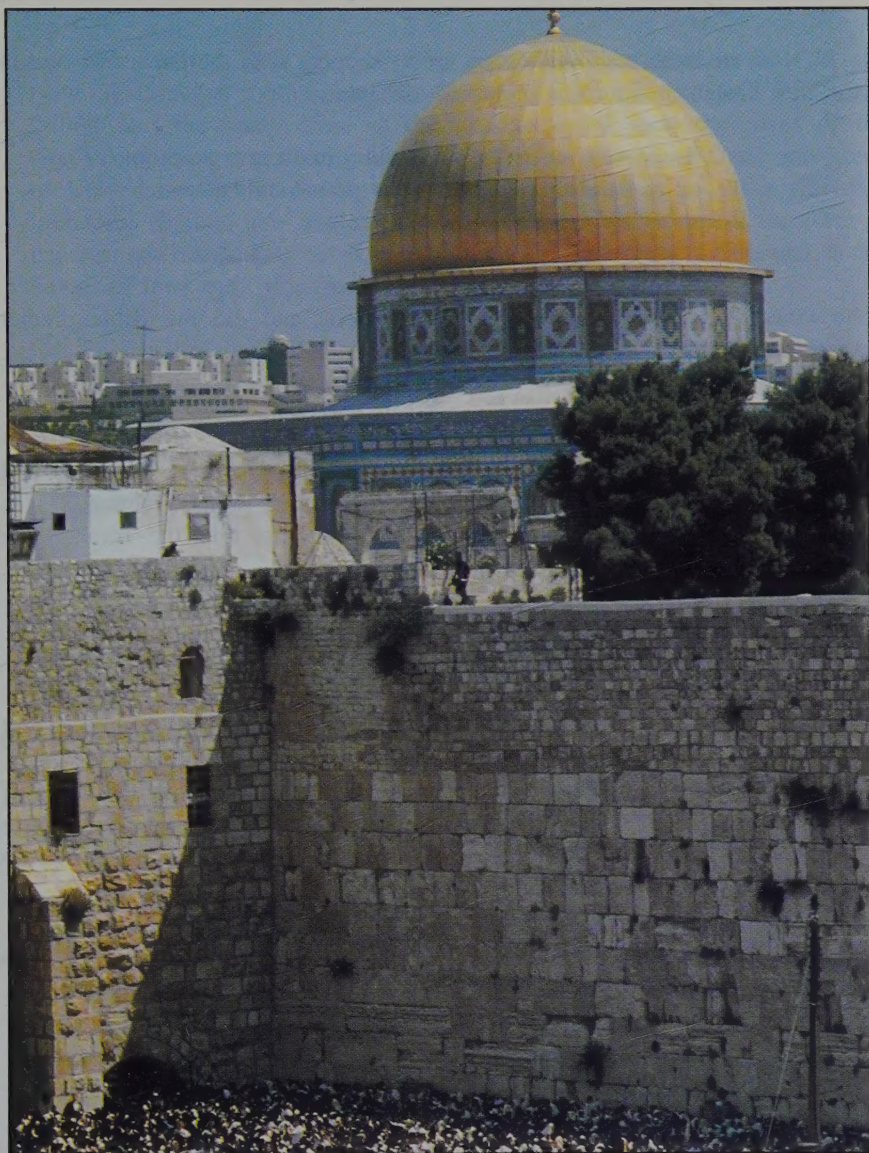
Today we have three distinct religions all with a common origin and all stating that acceptable worship is to honour God and to believe in His Word. They all agree that there is to be judgement on mankind in the future and that 'justification by faith' will be the basis of acceptance by God. They also agree that love of our neighbour is the second great commandment, as Jesus himself said:

'...Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets' [*Matthew 22.37-40*].

Mohammed added to this the need for prayer throughout the day, a principle to which all Jews and Christians would subscribe. Later, in his 'five pillars of wisdom' he included the value of the self-discipline of fasting at Ramadan and the benefit of a pilgrimage to Mecca.

With much in common and with submission to the will of God being paramount, (Islam means submission) how is it that we see so many Jews, Christians and Moslems involved in war and violence around the world?

We recognise that the Jews, under God's direct instructions, destroyed the Canaanites as they entered the Holy Land. But that does not excuse or justify Jew or Arab or Christian fighting over territory today. It did not justify the Sword of Islam in the 8th Century AD, or the Crusades in the 10th Century AD or the Spanish Inquisition. It does not justify the atrocities in Northern Ireland, in Bosnia, in Israel, or in Afghanistan.



Jerusalem - the meeting point of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In the foreground is the Western or Wailing Wall. Behind this on the site of Solomon's temple, is the mosque known as The Dome of the Rock and close by is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (not shown).

None of these man made wars are in keeping with the Bible message in the New Testament for Jesus said to his disciples:

‘...Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.’

[*Matthew 5.44*]

So where did these major religions go wrong and did the Bible predict these events?

CHANGING THE WORD OF GOD

Over the years since Israel became a nation, the Jews developed their oral traditions, which were collected together in the Talmud. This became of equal, if not more importance to the Jews than the Torah. The Pharisees were roundly condemned for this by Christ:

‘...Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your traditions’ [*Matthew 15.6*].

The Jews meticulously copied the inspired writings of the Old Testament letter by letter, so that it is unchanged over thousands of years. It is obviously essential not to corrupt the Word of God with the ideas of men. The Word of God is timeless and He does not change. The Apostle John tells us to check all claims to be inspired against the original Divine revelation:

‘Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world’ [*1 John 4.1*].

Or to quote the prophet Isaiah:

‘To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them’ [*Isaiah 8.20*].

When the New Testament was compiled in the first Century AD, it was

this criterion that was set and there is no conflict between the Old and New Testaments. However the Christian community could not resist falling into the same error as the Pharisees and soon the ideas of the Greeks involving the immortality of the soul, a Trinity of Gods and going to heaven or hell at death, crept into their teaching and into Christian literature. In fact new doctrines are still being added today in the form of papal encyclicals. The result is that there are now many differences in the beliefs of Jews and Christians.

In the 7th Century AD the sayings of Mohammed were written down in the Koran. His ideas were based on the Old Testament. The fundamentals were sound but he rewrote much of the history in the Bible in terms of the Arabs instead of the Jews. Furthermore he incorporated several of the Greek based doctrines introduced by the Christians. These include going to heaven or hell at death but not the Trinity.

In Genesis, the first book of the Bible, we learn about Abraham and his descendants. He had two sons - Isaac and Ishmael. It is easy to understand how a descendant of Ishmael would feel aggrieved at God's choice of Isaac and want to rewrite the narrative but Mohammed claimed to reverence the Word of God so how could he change it? This represents a separation between the Almighty and the Word that He spoke. This is the same basic problem that has arisen throughout history. Man in his arrogance wants to do things in his own way rather than accept that God is in control.

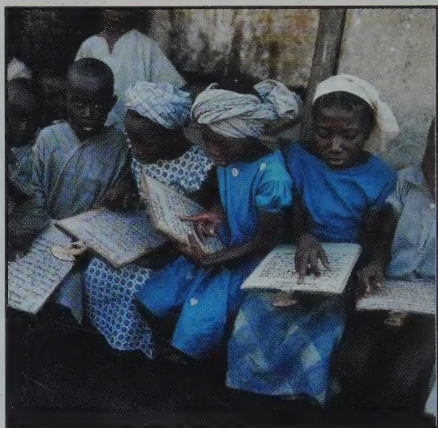
The Bible clearly states that the Messiah would come from the descendants of Isaac. God said to Abraham *'in Isaac shall thy seed be called'* [Genesis 21.12]. This seed or descendant was the seed in which all families of the earth would be blessed, as God said to Abraham [Genesis 12.3] and that seed was Christ as the Apostle Paul tells us [Galatians 3.16]. The letter to the Galatians was written 600 years before the Koran.

Perhaps Mohammed obtained the Torah from the Jews in Arabia and had not read the New Testament. If that is the case, it is sad that he did not realise that the Arab nations and the rest of the Gentiles do not need to rewrite history. The blessings promised to Abraham were to affect all nations:

‘And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen (Gentiles) through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham’ [*Galatians 3.8,9*].

The followers of Islam recognise that Jesus Christ was a prophet. Indeed the Shiite Moslems in Iran expect Jesus to return as the Messiah. The Sunni Moslems expect another prophet. Again we have the same problem. Mohammed accepted the one God but rewrote the Scriptures and now his followers have additional books to add to the Koran.

Why do men wish to rewrite history? The answer seems to revolve around nationalism, which is the second reason for the problems of these three major religions.



*Children reading The Koran
in Ibadan, Nigeria*

NATIONALISM

The importance of nationalism in religion can easily be seen in the many religious wars that have occurred throughout the centuries. Men use religion as an excuse for political ends. This is due to the greed of human nature and also a misunderstanding of the Word of God.

The Bible clearly states that God and not man is in control of the nations but men still insist on rampaging through the earth using religion as an excuse for all kinds of evil. The prophet Daniel reminded Nebuchadnezzar the proud ruler of ancient Babylon of this:

‘...that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to

whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men' [*Daniel 4.17*].

Or again in the New Testament the message is the same:

'God that made the world and all things therein...hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation' [*Acts 17.24-26*].

This being the case, all those who claim to believe the Word of God and to have faith in His prophecies, should recognise that fighting over territory is pointless. The submission of Islam is hardly a characteristic of terrorists who commit atrocities in the name of their religion.

The pointless nature of religious war, especially between Jew and Gentile, was carefully explained by Paul in the 3rd chapter of his letter to the Galatians. He tells us that the two sons of Abraham were an allegory – they represented something. Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman Hagar, represents the Jewish nation under the bondage of the Law of Moses. The law could not make them free from the bondage of sin. Isaac, born to the free woman Sarah, represents those who have faith in Christ and are free from sin having forgiveness through him. Looked at in this light we should rejoice not in being a Jew or an Arab but in being a son or daughter of God. Paul concludes:

'For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise' [*Galatians 3.26-29*].

So we have Jews, Christians and Moslems all rewriting the Scriptures instead of living by its tenets. No believer of the Bible can ever take up the sword against another for political or territorial reasons

except under the instruction of God after the return of Jesus Christ. It was Mohammed who said *'The best jihad is the Word of God.'* So what does the Bible have to say about the outcome of the present turmoil?

ISLAM IN PROPHECY

In the 4,000 years since the separation of the two sons of Abraham into Jew and Arab we can see a continuous fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament. God said to Abraham:

'And also of the son of the bondwoman will I
make a nation, because he is thy seed'
[Genesis 21.13].

Ishmael dwelt in the wilderness of Paran on the east of the Sinai peninsular and as God predicted:

'He will be a wild man; his hand will be against
every man and every man's hand against him;
and he shall dwell in the presence of all his
brethren' [Genesis 16.12].

This has certainly been fulfilled. Ishmael had 12 sons which are listed in the book of Genesis and the numerous Arab nations descended from him are still in the same geographical area today [Genesis 25.13-18]. Esau, the eldest son of Isaac, married one of Ishmael's daughters [Genesis 28.9] after giving his birthright to Jacob his twin brother. This complicates further the relationship of Jew and Arab.

In the letter to the Hebrews we are told that Esau represents all those who choose materialism instead of having faith in God [Hebrews 12.16,17]. How ironic it is that the extreme minority of Moslems that have become terrorists, repudiate the materialism of the western nations and yet continue to use their territorial lust to promote racial hatred. The same contradictions are apparent in all Jews and Christians who take up the sword with nationalism in their hearts.

ISLAM AND THE FUTURE

All three religions have an expectation of judgement to come,

whether at the hand of Jesus Christ or some other prophet. The prophecies of the coming kingdom of God are therefore relevant to Jews, Christians and Moslems.

Ishmael dwelt in Paran and Esau dwelt in Edom, to the south and east respectively of present day Israel. Today there are Arab nations on all sides of Israel and Moslem nations extend to the east across Africa and north to the Balkans and to the southern states of the previous USSR and to the west to Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Many of these nations are hostile to the nation of Israel. In Psalm 83 we find a list of ten nations around Israel which include Edom and Ishmael who have said:

‘Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance’ [*Psalm 83.4*].

This is a very prevalent and current attitude in the Middle East and the escalation of the long running hostilities has been expected for a long time. As has happened many times to Israel in the past, Israel forgets its relationship to God’s purpose and eventually runs into trouble. When the nation of Israel turns to God in their extremity, then He will send their Messiah who will save them and also offer salvation to all who have faith in the one true God.

The coming judgement of the nations is imminent. The criterion for acceptance into the kingdom of God is the same for Jews, Christians and Moslems, indeed for all men and women. If we can reject the additional ideas, doctrines and traditions that men have consistently added to the Word of God, accept it and respond to its teaching, then there is a hope for each of us.

Richard Griffiths
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Editorial

THE TAJ MAHAL (cover picture) is perhaps the most famous of India's ancient monuments. It was built as the mausoleum of Arjumand Banu Bagam, known as Mumtaz Mahal (the Elect of the Palace) who was the wife of Shah Jahan. She died in 1631, while on a military campaign with her husband. The building was 20 years in construction and 20,000 men were said to have been involved in the project. The tomb is over 73 metres (240 ft) high and is lavishly decorated with Koranic inscriptions and carved reliefs. It is raised on a square podium with a minaret at each corner. In front of the building is a large garden with a pool at its centre. Mosques and tombs of other less favoured wives stand nearby.

This magnificent building reminds us that the influence of Islam spread far beyond its beginnings in western Arabia in the 7th Century AD. The territorial influence of the Arabian rulers, the Caliphs, took Islam beyond Arabia into sub-Saharan Africa, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. The Ottoman empire, ruled by the Sultans from Constantinople (Istanbul) from the 15th Century onwards, brought the Islamic religion further into Europe and today there are large Muslim communities throughout the Western world.

The first article in this issue examines the uprise of Islam in the light of God's Word the Bible which was completed over 500 years before Mohammed came on the scene. We believe that the Bible alone is God's inspired message to mankind and religious beliefs that conflict with its message cannot be relied on. We wait for the time when God will intervene to re-establish the one true Faith as the only world-wide religion in the age to come, as foretold by the prophets of Israel:

'And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it' [*Isaiah 2.2*].

Basic Bible Teaching

Jesus – The Son of God

THE TEACHING OF the Bible about God and his Son the Lord Jesus Christ, has been rejected by the majority of those who call themselves Christians. Instead they believe in what is nothing more than a man-made theory called the doctrine of the Trinity. They believe that Jesus is God the Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity, which consists of three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, all co-eternal and equal with one another. The word 'Trinity' and the phrase 'God the Son' are not to be found in the Bible.

It was not until the 4th century AD that the doctrine of the Trinity was introduced and superimposed on the original Christian message. Many theologians have admitted that the doctrine was not taught in the Bible. For example, Dr W.R. Matthews, who was for many years Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, wrote *'The doctrine of the Trinity formed no part of the original message, St. Paul knew it not and would have been unable to understand the meaning of the terms used in the theological formula on which the Church ultimately agreed.'* [God in Christian thought and experience page 10.]

THE UNITY OF GOD

The teaching of the Bible is that God is a Unity and that Jesus is His only begotten Son. Jesus himself claimed to be the Son of God (never God the Son) and the New Testament Scriptures endorse that claim. It is vitally important that we understand the Bible teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. If we fail to do this, then the nature of Jesus cannot be fully appreciated. Also the great sacrifice that he made in laying down his life

for the redemption of mankind is deprived of its significance. How then can we properly worship God if we do not understand who He is?

The Bible teaches that there is only one God and not three. This doctrine is found first in the Old Testament. Moses said to the children of Israel:

‘Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD.’ [Deuteronomy 6.4]

The same teaching is found in the words of the prophet Isaiah:

‘I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me.’ [Isaiah 45.5]

Jesus himself endorsed the teaching of the Old Testament, that there is only one God. In answer to a question from one of the scribes he quoted the words of Moses to Israel ‘...*The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord*’ [Mark 12. 29]. Jesus never claimed that he was part of a Holy Trinity. On the contrary, he consistently taught that God was his Father and that he was dependent on Him.

In his letters to the first century Christians Paul emphasised the importance of the unity of God:

‘There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.’

[Ephesians 4. 4-6]

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul clearly stated that Jesus is not part of the Godhead but that the Father and Son are two distinct persons:

‘But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.’ [1 Corinthians 8.6]

Many Christians believe that the Lord Jesus Christ existed before he was born of Mary. There is a sense in which it could be said that Jesus was from the beginning. He was in the mind of God from the beginning, for God's plan centred in Jesus existed from the beginning. God knew that man would sin and that death would come as a result. He knew that man would require a saviour. He purposed from the beginning to beget a son who would fulfil this vital role as the Saviour. Now if God plans anything, we know with absolute certainty that it will come to pass.

BORN OF A VIRGIN

Jesus is the very pivot of God's purpose, so when He told faithful people in Old Testament times about His purpose, He also told them about the coming of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, as we read in Isaiah:

‘...Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel’ [*Isaiah 7.14*].

When a birth takes place, a new life comes into existence and the birth of Jesus was no exception. When speaking of this remarkable event, the Apostle Paul wrote:

‘But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.’ [*Galatians 4.4 RSV*]

In other words, when the time was right the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, a God-fearing woman in Israel, to tell her she was the one chosen by God to bear His Son. When she enquired how this should be, seeing she was a virgin, the angel told her quite explicitly:

‘...The Holy Ghost (Spirit) shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.’

[*Luke 1.35*]

You will notice that there is no suggestion here that the Holy Spirit was the third person of the Trinity – it was the power of God used to bring about this miraculous event.

SON OF GOD AND SON OF MAN

The Bible is very specific in its teaching about the person and nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. The most outstanding and persistently stated fact about him is that he is the 'Son of God'. Mark commences his Gospel record with the words *'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God'* [Mark 1.1]. It is a fundamental teaching and so simple that Jesus is both Son of God and Son of Man. By Divine intervention he became Son of God and by his birth of Mary he inherited her human nature. He was therefore Son of man although no man was literally his father.

The most powerful witness that Jesus is the Son of God is to be found in the words of God Himself, when He publicly declared at his Son's baptism: *'thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'* [Mark 1.11]. This was also confirmed by Peter when he publicly declared his conviction to Jesus: *'...Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God'* [Matthew 16.16].

A human son begotten of a human father may or may not be like his father. Sometimes the likeness is so remarkable that observers may say *'he is just like his father'*, or *'I can see his father in him.'* Now the New Testament makes it clear that the great quality of Jesus as the only begotten Son of God, was that he perfectly and completely in all that he said and did, exhibited the likeness of God. This was because his character expressed the mind and character of God. Just as an image is impressed on a coin, so was the character of God impressed on Jesus, so much so that when Philip asked Jesus to show them the Father, Jesus answered him: *'...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father'* [John 14.9]. We also read in Hebrews that Jesus is *'the brightness of his (God's) glory, and the express image of his person'* [Hebrews 1.3].

In that well known but much misunderstood first chapter of John we read that *'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth'* [John 1.14]. This doesn't mean that God came in human form

as many believe, but that God's Word or purpose was now expressed in human form. He was the only begotten of the Father, God's only Son, the perfect manifestation of his Father, exhibiting the attributes of his Father - love, mercy, justice and truth. Jesus on several occasions emphasised that salvation is conditional on a correct understanding of who he was as we read in the Gospel record of John:

'...this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent' [John 17.3].

'But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name'
[John 20.31].

DEPENDENT ON THE FATHER

Jesus was very careful to dispel any idea that he was equal with his Father, or that he was part of the Godhead. The Jews on several occasions accused Jesus of making himself God, but he denied their charge, saying '*I am the Son of God*' [John 10.33-36]. Jesus was not equal with his Father (no son ever is, nor can be), therefore he could only do the things shown to him by God, he was subject to his Father as any son should be. So Jesus was and still is subject to God; he depended on God his Father for all things, as he said:

'I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgement is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me' [John 5.30].

'...My doctrine is not mine, but his who sent me'
[John 7.16].

'...My Father is greater than I' [John 14.28].

The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the believers at Corinth emphasising the relationship between the resurrected Christ and his Father: '*...I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ;*

and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God' [1 Corinthians 11.3].

THE VITAL WORK OF JESUS

As Jesus was of our nature, it was possible for him to sin and like us he was subject to death. This aspect of Bible teaching in no way detracts from the exalted status of Jesus as the Son of God for it was an essential part of God's plan to save mankind, as Paul wrote to the Galatians:

'(He came)...to redeem them that were under the law, (of sin and death) that we might receive the adoption of sons' [*Galatians 4.5*].

Jesus overcame sin and death, having first shared our nature. He first conquered sin in his life and then he conquered it in death. If he had been God or part of the Godhead, he could not have fully sympathised with our temptations and sufferings, as weak mortal creatures. However as a sinless representative of the human race, through his death he became the firstfruits of a new creation [*1 Corinthians 15.21-23*].

One of the main themes of the letter to the Hebrews is the identification of Jesus with our human nature in order that he should '*taste death for every man*' [*Hebrews 2.9*] and qualify him as a merciful and faithful high priest on behalf of his brethren [*Hebrews 2.17*].

'Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he (Jesus) also himself likewise partook of the same...' [*Hebrews 2.14*].

The Apostle then goes on to explain to us why this had to be:

'For verily he (Jesus) took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore **in all things** it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation

for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted' [*Hebrews 2.16-18*].

The Apostle is telling us that in order for Jesus to carry out his great work as a sacrifice for sin, he had to be of the same nature as those he had come to save. In order to be a merciful high priest he had to experience their temptations. Thus Jesus was like us '*in all things*' and was tempted '*in all points like as we are*' [*Hebrews 4.15*]. We all need saving, we all need Christ; for without this man, without his sacrifice, we would not have hope. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians concerning their position before they became believers:

'At that time ye were without Christ...having no hope, and without God in the world' [*Ephesians 2.12*].

What a dreadful situation to be in, but God is not willing that any should perish. For he desires that all men should turn to Him and be saved [*2 Peter 3.9*].

As a consequence of his perfect life and great sacrifice, God raised Jesus from the dead, gave him immortality and he is now exalted to his Father's right hand in heaven. His resurrection is the pattern and guarantee of the glorious nature to which his followers can attain at his coming. When Jesus returns to the earth to set up God's kingdom, he will still not be equal with God and when he has completed God's work on earth, eventually he will take second place to his Father as the Apostle Paul wrote:

'Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifested that he is excepted, which did put all

things under him. And when all things shall be subdued under him, then shall the Son also be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all' [1 Corinthians 15.24-28].

On one occasion, the Pharisees came to Jesus tempting him, so Jesus asked them a question: '*What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?*' They replied: '*The son of David.*' This was correct of course as the people had acknowledged when Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem. Jesus then challenged them by quoting David's prophetic words in the Psalms concerning the greatness of Christ and he asked them: '*If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?*' [Matthew 22.42-45]. Here was a paradox – the answer of course was that he was the descendant promised in the line of David but he was also the Son of God.

So dear reader, we pose the same question to you, 'What think ye of Christ?' The answer you give will of course determine your future destiny. For as Jesus said to the disbelieving Jews in Jerusalem, '*If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins*' [John 8.24].

On the other hand, Jesus says to all those who understand and believe the truth about him:

'This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent' [John 17.3].

Roy Shakespeare
West Midlands, England

For further information on this vital subject, read the book '**THE TRINITY true or false**' by J H Broughton and P J Southgate. Write to the Correspondence Secretary – address on inside back cover



From our Mail Bag

THE FOLLOWING QUESTION has been posed by one of our readers: *'How does the Friday crucifixion and resurrection on Sunday fit in with the three days and three nights in Scripture?'*

Jesus said that he would be in the tomb for *'three days and three nights.'* [Matthew 12.40] If we interpret the *'three days and three nights'* as meaning three 24-hour periods, we reach the position that Jesus must have been buried in the early hours of the Thursday morning preceding his resurrection. The *'three days and three nights'* were Thursday, Thursday night, Friday, Friday night, Saturday and Saturday night.

It seems certain however that Jesus was buried *'at even'* (say 5 p.m.) [Matthew 27.57; Mark 15.42], a conclusion which is in harmony with the inference that Jesus died about 3 p.m. the ninth hour of a Jewish day, which began at 6 a.m. [Matthew 27.46] We would therefore have to reckon the *'three days and three nights'* - if these were three 24-hour periods - as commencing on the Wednesday night and as ending on the Saturday. This leaves Saturday night unaccounted for and makes our Lord's stay in the tomb to have been actually three days and four nights, if we accept the view that Jesus rose from the dead *'early the first day of the week.'* [Mark 16.9]

It seems that, in view of the evening burial and morning resurrection of Jesus, it is quite impossible on any reckoning to make the entombment of our Lord 72 hours, i.e. three 24-hour periods, or three days and three nights.

The impression we get from reading Luke chapter 23 is that the women disciples, after noting where Jesus had been buried, went home and prepared spices and ointments, intending to anoint the body of Jesus as it lay in the tomb. As they were doing this, the Sabbath - commencing

at 6 p.m. Friday, and lasting until 6 p.m. Saturday (our reckoning) '*drew on.*' [Luke 23.54] This prevented these women from anointing the body until after the Sabbath. In other words, the first day of the week was their first opportunity for performing the loving service to their Master on which they had set their hearts. This is why we are expressly told that the women came to the tomb in the early hours of the first day of the week.

On this interpretation, Jesus was buried late on the Friday afternoon and rose again early on the following Sunday morning. The consensus of religious opinion favours this view and so regards Good Friday as the anniversary of the Crucifixion.

A reading of Luke chapter 23 verse 56 and Luke chapter 24 verse one seem to imply that Jesus was buried shortly before the Sabbath. It is clearly inferred in John's Gospel record that the bodies of the three men crucified at Calvary were removed from the crosses shortly before the beginning of the Sabbath [John 19.31] and it is common knowledge that the Jews did not allow the bodies of executed persons to remain exposed overnight.

The action of the women disciples in choosing the Sunday morning for the anointing of the body of Jesus and the anxiety of the Jews to clear the bodies from the crosses before the Sabbath seem to us to point fairly conclusively to a Friday crucifixion.

All the circumstances agree in inferring that there was no non-Sabbath day between our Lord's burial and his resurrection, and we know of no Scripture passage which goes against this inference.

Some have maintained that Jesus was crucified and buried on the Thursday afternoon, and that the following Friday and Saturday were both Sabbaths but there does not appear to be sufficient evidence for this claim. In any case, burial late on the Thursday afternoon would not allow for '*three days and three nights*' or 72 hours on a literal interpretation, between the burial and the resurrection in the early hours of the following Sunday.

If we feel that the evidence for a Friday crucifixion and burial of Jesus is satisfying, how are we to understand the statement by Jesus that

he would be '*three days and three nights in the heart of the earth?*' [Matthew 12.40]

The answer lies in the fact that Jesus, himself a Jew, was speaking to Jews and made use of a well-known Jewish idiom. It is thus enunciated in the Jerusalem Talmud: '*A day and a night make an Onah, and a part of an Onah is as the whole.*' Dr. Lightfoot quotes this in his *Horae Hebraicae*, and adds: '*Therefore Christ may truly be said to have been in his grave three Onoth. . . the consent of the schools and the dialect of the nation agreeing thereunto.*'

Dean Farrar in his book *The Life of Christ* says. '*Matthew 12 verse 40 arises from the Jewish custom of regarding any fragment of a day, however short, as 'a night and a day', just as, in reckoning the years of a reign, they counted the shortest fragment of a year as a whole year.*'

We should compare the '*three days and three nights*' of 1 Samuel chapter 30 verse 12 with the '*three days*' of the next verse; the '*three days*' of 2 Chronicles chapter 10 verse 5 with '*the third day*' of verse 1; and the '*three years*' of Deuteronomy chapter 14 verse 28 with '*the third year*' of Deuteronomy chapter 26 verse 12. in order to obtain an illuminating idea of the Jewish use of chronological terms.

Twenty-four hours or thereabouts after Christ's burial, the Jews came to Pilate, and said: '*We remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day...*' [Matthew 27.63,64]. Similarly, Esther said to her people, '*fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink, three days, night or day,*' [Esther 4.16] yet '*on the third day*' [Esther 5.1] Esther held her banquet.'

It may be objected that as Jonah's imprisonment in the fish lasted three days and nights, Jesus *must* have been in the tomb for a like period but this is only a repetition of the mistake of interpreting an idiom literally. There is no reason whatever to suppose that Jonah's '*three days and three nights*' constituted a longer period than our Lord's stay in the garden tomb.

Correspondence Secretary

Time Period from Malachi to Christ

Period	Date	Event
	BC	
	460	The prophet Malachi
The Persian Period	450	
450-330 BC	425	
	400	
	375	
The Hellenistic Period	334	Alexander the Great begins the conquest
330-166 BC		Of the East
	323	Death of Alexander – Empire divided
	312	Ptolemy 1 st conquers Jerusalem
	311	Seleucus conquers Babylon
	275	
	250	
	223	Antiochus III (the Great) becomes Seleucid ruler of Syria
	198	Antiochus defeats Egypt and gains control of Palestine
The Hasmonean Period	175	Antiochus IV (Ephiphanes) rules Syria
166-63 BC	166	Mattathias and his sons rebel against Antiochus. Maccabean revolt begins under leadership of Judas Maccabeus. Jonathan is high priest
	142	Simon becomes high priest and establishes Hasmonean dynasty
	134	John Hyrcanus enlarges the independent Jewish state
	102	Alexander Janneus' rule
The Roman Period	63	Pompey invades Palestine
63 BC...	37	Herod the Great rules subject to Rome
	19	Herod's temple begun in Jerusalem
		Birth of Christ (4 BC?)
	AD	
	26	Christ's mission begins
	58	The Gospel of Matthew completed
	70	Destruction of Jerusalem by Titus
	96	Apostle John receives the Revelation

Between the Testaments

THE OLD TESTAMENT closes with the book of Malachi but the exact date of writing is unknown. We know from the prophet's references to the temple and the priests, that Malachi lived after the rebuilding of the temple around BC 516. In the first chapter of this prophecy there is reference to the governor and this is generally recognised as the Persian ruler [*Malachi 1.8*]. The state of affairs during the prophet's ministry are similar to that described at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah and various commentators agree that the date of writing was around BC 460.

The Gospel of Matthew is the first of the New Testament books and is reckoned to have been written about the middle of the first century AD. It takes up the narrative with the events surrounding Christ's birth and his miraculous conception and birth of the virgin Mary. The background to the times of Jesus saw Israel under the control of Rome with an army of occupation in the land and an uneasy relationship existing between the Romans and the Jews. During this period there was dual authority over the land with the Jewish leaders being responsible for the general religious and moral laws of the people and the Romans providing their own legal framework to control the conquered land.

Herod the Great was Prefect of Galilee and his family, although nominally Jewish were Idumeans or Edomites. The Romans had appointed his grandfather Antipas governor of Idumea and Julius Caesar made his father procurator of Judea. It was Mark Anthony who appointed Herod the Great Tetrarch of Galilee in 37BC and he died in 4BC with a Roman procurator governing the province. There were five Roman Governors in office during the period covered by the New Testament namely Rufus, Gratus, Pilate, Felix and Festus.

If you are familiar with the prophecy of Daniel, you will know that

chapter two refers to a great metallic image which represented the four great Empires which had rule over the Land of Israel, beginning with Babylon then Medo-Persia, Greece and finally Rome.

The prophet Malachi lived at the end of Persian supremacy but Matthew lived at the time when Rome had conquered this area. Therefore the gap between the Old and New Testaments was a period when Greece ruled supreme (See chart on facing page). This period was represented by the belly and thighs of brass – part of Nebuchadnezzar's image in Daniel's prophecy. This was a period of some four hundred years, during which time there were no prophets through which God would communicate to the nation of Israel. There were no new revelations for the faithful to cling to, but they were not forgotten or forsaken in the Divine plan.

The period between the message of Jesus to John in Revelation (the last book of the New Testament) whilst he was in exile on the Island of Patmos and now, has some similarities for believers today. Both the Old and New Testaments tell us about God's promises and the coming of the Messiah and contain the inspired writings to provide us with information on which we must hope and be patient. This was the message of James to believers in the 1st Century: *'Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord' [James 5.7].*

The period of Grecian domination saw the rise of Alexander the Great and the first Greek victory over Persia was fought outside a place called Marathon. From there a runner was sent to tell the news to the Greeks at the Parthenon in Athens, where he died after he had given his account. From this event springs the basis of the modern marathon race which is 26 miles long, the same distance covered by the Greek runner.

Ezekiel's prophecy refers to the destruction of the city of Tyre [Ezekiel chapter 26]. This was fulfilled when Alexander used the remains of old mainland Tyre to create a causeway from the mainland to the island fortress of new Tyre, which took seven months to complete. Ezekiel tells us that it was Nebuchadnezzar who, some 250 years earlier destroyed old Tyre on the mainland after a siege of 13 years. It was the rubble from this event that was so cleverly used by Alexander to reach the island. We

read in Ezekiel chapter 26: *'They shall destroy the walls of Tyrus, and will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock...they shall lay thy stones and thy timber and thy dust in the midst of the water'* [Ezekiel 26.4,12].

After this Alexander the Great moved down the coast and totally destroyed Gaza. At the same time Alexander had his eyes firmly set on Jerusalem and he sent a notice to its leaders that the city would be his next conquest.

We read from contemporary sources that the people were alarmed and Judah the High Priest at Jerusalem first protested but later claimed to have had a vision from God. His solution was to hang garlands around the city, throw open the gates on the approach of Alexander and his army and go out to meet the enemy in his pontifical robes with the priests in ceremonial attire all dressed in white.

This they did and to everyone's surprise Alexander fell prostrate in adoration and when one of his close aides asked him why, he replied that he worshipped not the high priest, but his God and then claimed to have seen a vision of this event before he left Greece.

The historian Josephus tells us that Judah talked to Alexander about the prophecies of Daniel and how Greece was destined to succeed Persia. As a result it is claimed that Judea escaped from any tax in the form of tribute money, although some cast doubt upon all the facts of the case as being partly a legend built up by the Jews.

Later Alexander's exploits took him down into Egypt and it is accepted that he removed 100,000 Jews into his new colony in Egypt. He had a great influence on Middle Eastern culture. The Greeks also translated the Old Testament Scriptures into Greek, Ptolemy Philadelphus sponsoring the Septuagint version of the Bible. In the book of Daniel we find a prophecy regarding the conquests of Alexander the Great and his successors. [Daniel chapter 8] He died in BC 323 at the age of 32 and the kingdom was divided among his four generals as the prophet's words had foretold.

After Alexander's death, the area of Judaea came under the control

of one of his generals named Laomedon. Later Egypt took Jerusalem and for many years the Jews were pawns in a tug of war between Egypt and Syria as the power of Greece receded.

Two notable events occurred at this time when the Egyptians tried to enter the temple in Jerusalem against the religious laws of the Jews. Antiochus III persisted and when trying to cross the inner court he fell down with sudden dread and horror and was carried away half dead. Some time later when Heliodorus was sent to assess the wealth in the temple he was terror struck by an awful vision and withdrew, coming to the conclusion that the temple was protected by a power greater than any man.

Antiochus also made decrees which were impossible for the Jews to accept, requesting them to pay homage to idols and to eat swine's flesh. He also destroyed copies of the Torah (the Law of Moses). The death penalty was pronounced upon any who would not accept these decrees. Antiochus even sold the high priesthood to the highest bidder, one Menelaus, who was not entitled to it and in BC 168 his nominee was ejected. These events resulted in a Jewish backlash which was brought about by the Hasmonaeans under Mattathias and his sons who are better known as the Maccabees. Mattathias was a priest descended from Phinehas the son of Eleazer of the family of Aaron and they lived in a city called Modein.



Statue of Alexander the Great at Salonika in Northern Greece.

What Antiochus had underestimated was the resilience and fanatical dedication of the Hasidim (or men of the covenant), who offered their very lives willingly for the law. This rebellion started when Mattathias openly rejected the Egyptian decrees and killed the Egyptian officer

Apelles. This was the start of a rebellion, with his sons summoning other citizens to join them in their uprising.

The five sons of Mattathias were Johanan, Simon, Judas, Eleazer and Jonathan. They went to the Judaeen hills which were well suited to guerrilla warfare and their numbers greatly increased. However on one occasion 1,000 of their number were killed in a cave on the Sabbath day, as they did not wish to pick up their weapons and defend themselves on such a holy day.

The result of this was that they changed their strict observance and conducted guerilla warfare in the towns and cities. They took their warfare in a more open style to the enemy and their numbers increased to over 6,000. A successful battle brought about the rout of Antiochus' army which enabled them to gain possession of Jerusalem. Their independence lasted for some 23 years until BC 63 and their main victory was celebrated annually by a feast which occurred about the time of the winter solstice and is referred to in the Gospel of John. [John 10. 22].

So in the terms of Daniel's prophecy the iron legs of the image



emerged as the power of Rome and they became the dominant ruler [Daniel 2.40]. Under their regime the background was set for the Messiah to arrive and for the events of his life and death in fulfillment of the words of the Old Testament prophets.

Under the Romans with their organisation, roads, communication and common language, the ideal time arrived to give Christianity the opportunity to spread and become established throughout Asia Minor reaching even into Europe and North Africa.

So we see that the events in Israel changed rapidly during the period between the Testaments and it was only the zeal of some Jews in the land that kept them separate and full of hope, hanging onto all the words of the prophets.

As we have seen from this short summary of events, the period between the Testaments was eventful although there were no recorded books or accounts to add to the canon of Scripture. There are ancient records of these events including the books of the Maccabees which were added to the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. These are now included in the Apocrypha which is not regarded as part of the canon of Scripture.

The events which took place were in accordance with prophecies made many years before, like those in the book of Daniel around BC 600. This gives us great confidence that God's hand is in control in the international events which affect His chosen people Israel and His wider people who accept his promises and commit their way to following Jesus.

Just as the Old Testament Prophets looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, let us do the same in confidence remembering the words which the Apostle Paul addressed to the Greeks of his day in Athens:

'God hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he has given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead' [Acts 17.31].

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